



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



VETERANS DAY AT THE SOUTH DAKOTA STATE FAIR

At the request of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, Gov. Dennis Daugaard has proclaimed Thursday, Aug. 30, 2018, as Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair, calling on all South Dakotans to honor those men and women who fought bravely for our freedoms.

At 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, Aug. 30, the South Dakota State Fair will host a "Salute to Veterans" program. The program will be held on the Northwest Energy Freedom Stage (Recreation Avenue). Susan Irons, Veterans Service Officer for Lincoln and Union Counties, will be the keynote speaker.

Special music will be provided by Raptor, commercial musical ensemble of the United States Air Force Heartland of America Band.

"Whether in peace or at war, the important role of our veterans cannot be denied. They are men and women from all walks of life that have one thing in common --- a love for this great country," said Secretary Zimmerman. "No matter where or when veterans have served, they've always served with distinction and their service to this country is a bridge that was built on courage, dedication and patriotism."

Representatives from the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Service Organizations, as well as county veterans service officers will have informational booths in the Veterans Building on Flag Avenue throughout the entire length of the Fair. Veterans are encouraged to stop by the booth and learn more about benefits and programs available to them as well.

To show appreciation for their service, the Fair will give all veterans and active military personnel free gate admission on Aug 30.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Stand Down	2
Veterans Care Conference	2
Forever GI Bill® Expansion	3
Purple Heart	4
Sen. Rounds Message	5
SDNG Soldier Best Warrior	6
Upcoming Events	7



VA VETERANS STAND DOWN



Last week, SDDVA Field Officer Kevin Swanson and Charles Quinn, County Veterans Service Officer for Hughes, Stanley, and Sully Counties, participated in the VA Veterans Stand Down in Pierre.

The Stand Down provided veterans and their families an opportunity to speak to partners within the veteran network about benefits, patient advocates, outreach, mental health services and healthcare.



IMPROVING VETERANS CARE CONFERENCE

Northeast South Dakota AHEC, in coordination with the Black Hills VA Health Care System, is pleased to announce the 2018 Improving Veterans Care Conference will be held in Rapid City on Tuesday, September 11, 2018. This one-day conference will be held from approximately 8:30 am-4:00 pm at the Black Hills State University Center in Rapid City.

This year's topics include military sexual trauma, suicide prevention, and opioid addiction.

Registration is now open and can be found at the following link:

<https://www.nesdahec.org/events/view/improving-veterans-care-conference>.

Cost for attendance is as follows until September 11, 2018: \$75 for VA employees and \$95 for non-VA employees.

For more information or questions, please contact Northeast South Dakota AHEC at 605-229-8305 or c.quenzer@nesdahec.org.

Save the Date

Improving Veterans Care Conference

This mental health summit delivers important information that will assist healthcare providers and other professionals as they work to support families of Veterans and our Citizen Soldiers in South Dakota.

This one-day mental health summit will be held in Rapid City.

Black Hills State University Center
4300 Cheyenne Boulevard
Rapid City, South Dakota

Tuesday
September 11, 2018

Focus:
Military Sexual Trauma
Opioid Addiction & Treatment
Suicide Prevention

VA Recovery

To register & for details contact Northeast SD AHEC:
www.nesdahec.org or call (605)229-8305

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Northeast South Dakota Area Health Education Center

FOREVER GI BILL® EXPANDS VA EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

Effective Aug. 1, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) implemented 15 more provisions of the [Harry W. Colmery Educational Assistance Act of 2017](#), also referred to as the Forever GI Bill®.

These provisions, in addition to the 13 implemented since the law was signed less than a year ago, will have an immediate and positive impact on Veterans and their families using VA benefits to pursue their educational goals.

“We are excited to get the word out about implementation of the provisions,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “From the day the Forever GI Bill was signed into law, VA, in collaboration with Veterans service organizations, state approving agencies and school certifying officials, has taken an expansive approach to ensure earned benefits are provided to Veterans in a timely, high-quality and efficient way.”

Some of the provisions that began Aug. 1 include:

- Recipients of a Purple Heart awarded on or after Sept. 11, 2001, are now eligible for full Post-9/11 GI Bill® benefits for up to 36 months, if not already entitled.
- Military and Veteran families who have lost a family member can now reallocate transferred Post-9/11 GI Bill® benefits.
- Additional Guard and Reserve service now counts toward Post-9/11 GI Bill® eligibility.
- Post-9/11 GI Bill® students may now receive monthly housing allowance for any days they are not on active duty, rather than having to wait until the next month; and
- Expansion of the [Yellow Ribbon Program](#), which makes additional funds available for GI Bill® students, now covers more students.

More provisions are scheduled related to science, technology, engineering and math benefit extensions; increased benefit levels; a pilot program for high-technology training geared toward “upskilling” Veterans to enter the workforce quickly; and another expansion of the Yellow Ribbon Program, which will be implemented by Aug. 1, 2022.

For more information, visit the [Forever GI Bill® – Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act page](#).

Visit the [Education and Training webpage](#) for more information. For questions about GI Bill® benefits, call the Education Call Center at 888-442-4551 from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. (CST) Monday through Friday. Join the conversation via [Facebook](#) or follow Veterans Benefits Administration on [Twitter](#).



PURPLE HEART RECOGNITION DAY IN SOUTH DAKOTA

At the request of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, Gov. Dennis Daugaard has proclaimed Monday, Aug. 7, 2018, as "Purple Heart Recognition Day," calling on all South Dakotans to honor those men and women who are recipients of the Purple Heart Medal.

"While we are grateful to all of those who have served our nation, the 7th of August is a day designated to remember and recognize the sacrifices endured by those members of the Armed Forces of the United States who have been awarded the Purple Heart Medal," said Larry Zimmerman, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "It is fitting to set aside a day to recognize those who have been awarded for their extraordinary sacrifices."

The Governor encourages all South Dakotans to set aside time on Aug. 7 to honor our soldiers who have been honored with the Purple Heart. "The men and women serving in our Armed Forces are tough, determined, courageous and capable of unbelievable acts of courage and sacrifice," said Gov. Daugaard.

"Our military remains as strong as it has ever been. America's veterans have been defined by the virtues of selfless service, sacrifice and devotion to duty," said Zimmerman. "These men and women, who serve and have served, are the flesh and blood of American exceptionalism."

LAKE TRAVERSE RESERVATION DELEGATED AS PURPLE HEART RESERVATION

The Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux tribal council will host a special dedication ceremony Tuesday, August 7, 2018, at 12:00 pm. During the ceremony the tribal council will officially adopt a resolution delegating Lake Traverse Reservation as a "Purple Heart Reservation."

Lake Traverse Reservation will be the second reservation in the nation, and the first in South Dakota, to be deemed a "Purple Heart Reservation."

Signs and markers are erected to remind us of the price soldiers have paid for the freedom we have.



MESSAGE FROM SENATOR ROUNDS

We are fortunate to live in the United States, where our men and women in uniform sacrifice so much to defend our liberty. We owe our servicemembers and veterans a debt of gratitude that we can never fully repay. However, one thing we can do is uphold the promises our nation has made to them over the last several generations, and we can do that by making improvements and changes within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The Senate recently confirmed Robert Wilkie to be the VA Secretary. Prior to his confirmation, Mr. Wilkie served as Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. He has also served in the U.S. Air Force Reserve and in the U.S. Navy Reserve. Mr. Wilkie has had firsthand experience dealing with the VA, as his father was wounded three times while serving in Vietnam. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I had the opportunity to meet with him prior to his confirmation and ask important questions during his hearing before the committee. It is clear that he is well-qualified to lead the VA, especially at a time when the agency is attempting to improve its mission of serving our nation's veterans.

With 360,000 employees, the VA is the second-largest federal agency. It is also, unfortunately, one of the most scandal-ridden and mismanaged agencies. We remember in 2014 when the VA admitted that veterans were waiting on average 115 days just to see a doctor. More recently, we've heard about the new VA hospital in Colorado that is more than \$1 billion over budget because the contractor failed to account for the size of medical equipment during construction and the rooms were too small to fit everything. Not to mention the project was years behind schedule.

Mr. Wilkie has a tough job ahead of him as he seeks to clean up the VA and improve care for veterans. In the past, the agency has shown protectionism for bad employees instead of taking care of veterans. Under Wilkie's leadership, we hope to see that change. He understands how critical it is that we provide healthcare and other services to veterans across the country, and he understands the challenges he is facing. I believe he is the right person at this time to lead the VA and make certain that care of veterans is priority number one for all VA employees.

When I had the opportunity to question Mr. Wilkie at his confirmation hearing, I shared with him my concerns regarding the recently-enacted VA MISSION Act, including the 40-mile rule change that could hurt rural veterans, the "gatekeeper" provision that requires a veteran to get approval from a VA employee to seek care outside of the VA, and a "VA BRAC," which could jeopardize the future of the Hot Springs VA facility. I told him that I am ready to work hand-in-hand with the VA to address these issues as they implement the VA MISSION Act.

The men and women who have sacrificed so much in service to our nation deserve to know that the VA will support them and make good on our country's promises to them. The care of veterans is my number one priority. I believe that it is Mr. Wilkie's main concern as well, and I look forward to working with him as he takes on the challenges of managing the VA.

SD SOLDIER WINS ARMY NATIONAL GUARD BEST WARRIOR COMPETITION

A South Dakota Army National Guard Soldier was named the 2018 Soldier of the Year for the Army National Guard during its Best Warrior Competition at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, July 22-27.

Spc. Bailey Ruff, of Sturgis, and a member with the Sturgis-based Detachment 2, 842nd Engineer Company, competed against the top National Guard Soldiers from across the country in a six-day, 13-event competition that tested them physically and mentally.

The competition included formal board interviews, physical fitness challenges, written exams, and warrior tasks and battle drills to test the whole Soldier concept.

Ruff is the first Soldier from South Dakota to win Soldier of the Year honors at the Army National Guard level.

"To win the national competition is a humbling experience," Ruff said. "The competitors at every competition I've been in thus far are great soldiers, and I'm honored to serve with them. Being able to walk away as the victor is an honor."

During the competition, soldiers were asked to demonstrate their proficiency in a variety of categories, to include: weapon systems, physical strength and endurance, land navigation and map reading, first aid, general Army knowledge and their ability to perform a variety of warrior tasks and battle drills throughout different scenarios.

"The most difficult aspect was the training leading up to the competition," Ruff said. "I train with an underdog mentality knowing my competitors ability level, so overcoming self-doubt and trying to convince myself I was good enough to deserve a place alongside the other Soldiers was truly testing. I have the utmost respect for those I have competed against."

Ruff moves on to represent the Army National Guard in the Department of the Army's Best Warrior Competition at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia, and the Pentagon from Sept. 30 to Oct. 5.

"I look forward to representing the National Guard," Ruff said. "I hope to show how amazing the Guard organization is through my performance."



UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 4—Homecoming for American Legion State Commander Denny Brenden—Ramkota Hotel and Event Center—Watertown (1901 9th Avenue SW) - 12:00—4:00 pm (CT)
Aug 11—Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Celebration—Mobridge/Pollock Highschool Gym—2:00 pm (CT)
Aug 15—Sioux Falls VA Show and Shine—2501 W. 22nd Street—5:30—8:00 pm (CT)
Aug 20-24—SDDVA Benefits School—Ramkota—Pierre
Aug 24-30—American Legion National Convention—Minneapolis, MN
Aug 30—Veterans Day at the State Fair (Salute to Veterans 10:30 am (CT) Freedom Stage
Sept 1—14th Annual DAV/727th Poker Run—Brookings National Guard Armory (300 5th Street S) - 10:00 am (CT)
Sept 3—Labor Day (state offices closed)
Sept 7-9—PVA North Central Chapter Trap Shoot—Crooks Gun Club
Sept 10—Doug Brown Memorial Pheasant Hunt—Top Gun Hunting Ranch—Howard
Sept 11—Improving Veterans Care Conference—BHSU (4300 Cheyenne Boulevard) - Rapid City
Sept 14—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
Sept 21—7th Annual POW/MIA Program—Sioux Falls Veterans Memorial Park (1021 W. Bailey Street) 6:30 pm (CT)
Sept 21—Veterans Stand Down—VFW (3601 S. Minnesota Avenue) - Sioux Falls—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
Oct 10—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—Soldiers and Sailors Building—Pierre—8:00 am (CT)
Nov 16—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)



Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer
South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501
Phone: 605-773-8242
E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

